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Is Someone Plagiarizing Your Work?

By Michael Southon

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About two weeks ago I received an article submission that immediately attracted my attention. The title was identical to the title of an article I wrote and which was published in 'WebProNews' in May 1999.

"Probably just a coincidence", I thought to myself, and kept reading. But the first paragraph stopped me in my tracks. It was quite clearly plagiarized from my article. As I kept reading I recognized sentence after sentence that had been lifted from my article and then modified slightly.

The whole article was plagiarized. I could hardly believe it. As the English say, I was 'gob-smacked'.

What Is Plagiarism?

'Plagiarism' comes from the Latin word 'plagiarius', a kidnapper. Here are two dictionary definitions of plagiarism:

'[to] take (the work or idea of someone else) and pass it off as one's own' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, Third Edition, 1999).

'to appropriate ideas, passages etc. from another work or author' (Collins Dictionary of the English Language, ed. P. Hanks 1979).

Plagiarism can be done in many ways, but the most common technique is to paraphrase someone else's words.

Here's an example:

Original:

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"And if you've matched the ezine to the product you're selling, you've reached your target audience."

Plagiarized version:

"If you have correctly matched the ezine or newsletter to the product you're selling, then you will have reached your target audience."

As you can see, the plagiarist has simply taken the original and then replaced the phrase 'you've matched' with the phrase 'you have correctly matched', inserted the words 'or newsletter', and replaced the word 'you've' with the words 'then you will have'.

Part of the reason that plagiarism is so rampant on the Internet is that many people genuinely believe that it's okay to take someone else's writing, make a few changes, and then present it as their own.

Is Plagiarism a Crime?

As far as I know plagiarism is not a crime in most countries, and this is probably because plagiarism is so difficult to define. How many words does a plagiarist have to substitute and rearrange before the copied version ceases to be a copy of the original?

This is why plagiarism is much more difficult to deal with than copyright theft. A copyright thief simply steals your work, lock-stock-and-barrel. A plagiarist steals your work and disguises it as their own.

But while plagiarism may not be a crime, it is heavily sanctioned in professions that are based on the written word. I know of one professor of sociology who lost his job almost overnight because he plagiarized someone else's work. And in journalism the consequences of being exposed as a plagiarist would be the same.

Unfortunately, internet plagiarism is flourishing. There's now a whole industry that supplies college students with 'model' term papers for the purpose of plagiarism. Here are just some of the websites that are part of this industry:

School Sucks

Other People's Papers

Evil House of Cheat

But the plagiarism industry has spawned another industry: websites and software designed to detect plagiarism. One such software was developed by turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com) and plagiarism.org (www.plagiarism.org).

This is how it works: the software makes a 'digital fingerprint' of a submitted document using an elaborate set of algorithms. That fingerprint is then checked against a database that contains over 1 billion publicly-available web pages. Plagiarism.org then produces an 'originality report' that gives the

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user an index of how original the submitted paper was, and whether it falls above or below the 'plagiarism threshold'.

This software, however – while an excellent tool for college professors – probably wouldn't help writers find out if their work has been plagiarized.

What Can You Do About It?

The Internet is so vast, chances are you wouldn't know if someone had plagiarized your work. I only discovered that my work had been plagiarized because the 'author' sent his plagiarized article to me for publication in my own newsletter.

But if you do discover that someone has plagiarized one of your articles, you could do what I did.

I immediately contacted the author of the 'article' and requested that he email everyone to whom he had sent the article, explaining that it was plagiarized, and that they should on no account publish it. I added that if he did not withdraw the article from circulation I would contact his web host and the moderators of any lists that distributed the article.

The author replied within a few hours and admitted that the similarity between the 2 articles was "VERY uncanny". He said he had no idea "how they could be so similar". But after a few emails, he did withdraw the article.

In a way, it's a compliment when someone plagiarizes your work: it means you're writing good stuff. But that's little consolation. If you make your living from writing on the Internet, plagiarism could be the greatest threat to your livelihood.

(c) 2001 by Michael Southon

Michael Southon has been writing for the Internet for over 3 years. He has shown hundreds of webmasters how to use this simple technique to get massive free publicity and dramatically increase traffic and sales. [Click here to find out more:](#)

5 Big Mistakes That Bloggers Make...

By Rudolf Freidlander

If you've just entered the world of blogging or if you've been blogging for a short time and find that things are not working out as you expected, it will be worth your while to spend some time understanding the common mistakes that bloggers make, mistakes that make it hard to enjoy what should be an enjoyable, satisfying experience: Blogging!

The five most common new blogger mistakes are:

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Diving in (rather than wading in)

Having unrealistic expectations

Losing focus

Plagiarizing

Ignoring the reader

Diving in! Many bloggers are so anxious to get started that they dive in rather than wading in slowly — its a mistake in an unfamiliar swimming pool or pond and its a mistake when entering a new arena such as the 'blogosphere.' Consider these things before you start your Blog:

Find a focus for your blog . . . a focus that reflects what you know, what interests you and what you enjoy talking and writing about. No topics are out of bounds: politics, religion, science, sexual orientations, comedy, exercise, diet, diseases, etc., etc..

Take the time to read dozens of different blogs: note the colors, graphics and layouts to get an idea of what appeals to you. Also note that some bloggers are long-winded and others are brief and to the point . . . others are just chatty and entertaining and have no particular point to make . . . this too is a personal style you get to choose.

You need a host for your blog, some are free, some charge a small amount per month for their service, some are simple to use and some require more technical knowledge, some have more features than others; choose carefully, once you've established your blog and have a few regular readers you may not want to change your address (your URL).

You may or may not want to use your real name on your blog, this depends on many factors, not the least of which is your stance on controversial issues and how publicly you want to be identified with your opinions.

Unrealistic expectations! If you come to blogging expecting instant results: a large readership and many complimentary comments, you may be disappointed. There are tens of thousands of blogs online vying for the same audience. Patience and tenacity are essential on your part. If you write well, find a unique niche to fill, have appealing titles for your posts and tirelessly promote your blog the readership and comments (some of which will be complimentary) will come.

Losing focus! When you started your blog you had a particular reason for doing so; it might have been to express your views on a topic or it might have been to just communicate with a close circle of friends about your daily activities. Readers will come to your blog for the first time and either be interested in your subject matter or not, will either like your style or not and, if they like your subject and style they may comment and then come back later. Once you've established a topic and tone for your blog you're free to change it but to do so you're basically starting all over.

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Be aware that you can have more than one blog, each one devoted to a particular topic and each one, if you choose, under a different identity.

Plagiarizing! There are some great bloggers out there and as you surf through blogs you might find one who said something really well, something that resonated with you and something you want to put in your blog. DON'T just copy and paste someone's words in your blog without giving them credit, making it look to the world like the words are yours. If you write it, write it in your own words and write it better, adding your own thoughts and feelings and then be gracious, mention where you got the idea and provide a link.

Ignoring the reader! Some of the people who read your blog will leave comments; some readers will agree with you and some readers may even praise your insights but most will pick a point you've made and criticize it. People leave comments on others blogs for the same reason they themselves blog, to exchange ideas and express their points of view. Always respond to your readers comments; thank them for reading and taking the time to comment (even the severe critics) and then respond, as appropriate, to their comment. If you ignore your comments your readers may end up ignoring your blog.

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